



May is Mental Health Awareness Month

by Ashley Newton
May 8 2020 2:11 PM



Mental wellness plays a critical role in each of our lives. The month of May, Mental Health Awareness Month, is an opportunity to remind ourselves of the ways we can foster mental wellness in our own lives and for those we love.

Consistently practicing self-care strategies, investing in trusted relationships, and seeking opportunities to give back to others are all examples of how you can care for yourself while nurturing a sense of belonging within your community and social circles. Practicing mental wellness also means seeking help when needed. Thankfully, there are many tools available to those seeking professional help, as well as to professionals working to help others. Such tools are becoming more widely available as healthcare providers expand treatment options to include virtual care or telehealth settings.

Following quickly on the heels of the recent SARS CoV-2 pandemic, providers across all parts of healthcare, including Centerstone, began deploying virtual care options designed to allow patients to access care safely from home. Most notably, these tools included telehealth and telephonic consultations.

Telehealth allows patients to interact with a healthcare provider in real-time, using telecommunications equipment, which includes both audio and video equipment. Patients typically access their appointment using a home computer, tablet or smartphone, though this may vary slightly between telehealth platforms. Patients who lack access to either the required equipment or internet connectivity may be offered telephonic appointments, where appropriate. Centerstone's experience is that offering both avenues works best for the greatest number of people, ensuring that those who need care can access it regardless of how they choose to engage.

Additional virtual care tools that allow providers to meet each patient's unique needs include remote data collection tools. Examples may include the ability for patients to electronically sign forms, complete and submit provider enrollment forms, complete questionnaires electronically, and to upload relevant documents for their care teams to review. Using such tools allows patients and providers alike to share important information related to their treatment goals, while maintaining the patient's confidentiality and privacy. Electronic surveys, frequently sent following an appointment, offer direct feedback to providers about how a patient experienced virtual care, what went well and what should change.

Lastly, there are specific tools and resources that support providers transitioning to virtual care settings. Working in this novel environment requires providers to translate and apply their therapeutic skills differently than they are accustomed to during in-person care. Consider for a moment the importance of non-verbal communication,

which accounts for nearly half of all communication, and how it surfaces in virtual care. Understanding a patient's spoken, and often unspoken, needs is quite challenging without the use of visual equipment and strong internet connectivity. This challenge is amplified when working virtually with new patients with whom the provider does not yet have an established relationship. Healthcare organizations like Centerstone can equip their workforce to provide high-quality, personalized and engaging virtual care by tailoring specialized clinical and technical trainings for key provider types. Doing so supports providers in making the transition to virtual care smooth while ensuring patients have the best possible experience working with their healthcare partners.

Ashley Newton is the Chief Operating Officer of Centerstone's Research Institute and also serves as Vice President of the Center for Clinical Excellence. Visit www.centerstone.org for more information.